

DHOFAR LETTER

News from Oman

Special Issue 8 February 1978

2. THE FOREIGN TROOPS IN OMAN

QABOOS ARMY OFFICER JOINS THE RANKS OF PFLO

Recently a staff-officer in the Dhofar Brigade (sometimes called the Salalah Brigade) of the Sultans Army, Captain Rabia Awadh Marzooq, joined the revolution. Hed did so after being convinced that the Qaboos regime is nothing but a cartoonist facade, while the country is run by the British and their foreign allies.

The interview we bring below was originally published in Saut Al Thawra No 5:5, November 1977, but we have added a number of new informations given in an interview with representatives from the solidarity work in December 1977.

Rabia Awadh said:

I joined the Sultans army in the first week after Qaboos became Sultan. My joining the army, did not mean that I was loyal to Qaboos or to the British, but was due to other reasons, which are as follows:

- 1) The stressing need for living, particularly in that periode
- 2) That I was unable to understand the real nature of the change in authority.

First I served in the Dhofar Gendarmery, a sort of guard corps. After this corps was dissolved in the first part of 1973, I was assigned to the Headquarter of the Dhofar Brigade, as a Staff-learner. In 1975 I was sent to England on a 7 months course and after returning to Oman I was appointed General Staff Officer of 3rd Degree (GSO 3), still in the headquarter of the Dhofar Brigade. And here I was untill I left and joined the revolution in the middle of 1977.

Following my promotion to the rank of officer, and following my closer contacts with the British and foreign officers, I discovered many things about the Qaboos regime, and came to know who really holds the power in Oman. My resentment against the authority increased after the occupation by the Iranian forces of the Omani Islands and after the flagrant Iranian invasion of Oman and after the handing over of the Masirah Island to the Americans.

For all these reasons I decided to join the Omani revolution in order to continue the march on the path of the armed struggle for liberating the land from all forms of colonialism and expelling the forces of imperialism and colonialism from Oman, and to establish a just and progressive national government in the country.

I am happy now, living a simple and plain life here among my comrades, finally free from alienation.

STRUCTURE OF THE SULTAN'S ARMY

The sultan's army is formed of three main forces. These are the land forces, the air force (SOAF) and the naval force (SON). The rate of Omanis in the army is nearly 50 %, while the rest are mostly Balush (about 40 % excluding the Omani Balush, i.e. Balush who won Omani nationality). The remaining 10 % come from different nationalities, mostly British, Pakistanis and Indians.

In spite of the fact that nearly half of the army are Omanis, they are deprived of key positions and influence. Foreexample the army commander is British, and his appointment is made by an announcement from the British Defence Ministry. The commanders of the navy, air force and Dhofar Brigade are also British and the staff officers in the three mentioned forces are nearly all British, Pakistanis and Indians. In a few infantry units, the command have been handed over to Omani Officers, not because of their brilliancy in military skills but because they are semiilliterate and known for their allegiance to the British.

As to the enlightened and educated Omani officers, they are scattered in the units without remarkable positions and have no influence at all in the army command. Every Omani officer receiving the command of a unit in for example the infantry has as his deputy a British person. The latter has full authority from the general command to pass orders to the Omani commander

because the Omani Officers are said to be still under training.

It is difficult to estimate the numbers of the Sultans Forces, but concerning the ground forces, alone in Dhofar there operates 4 infantry divisions (The Dhofar Brigade) and of these almost 2 divisions are operating in the Western region. In addition there are various smaller units such as guard units, the Royal Guard, Firqats etc. The Firqats are estimated to more than 600, operating in small groups of 30-50 men. Totally all of these forces operating in Dhofar are not less than 5000, probably more.

THE BRITISH FORCES IN OMAN

There are in Oman and particularly in Dhofar, British air, naval and land forces operating on Masirah Island and Salalah Air Base and by the side of the local army.

On Masirah there exists an airbase, as significant as any British base in the Indian Ocean or the Mediterranean. At the beginning of 1977 it appears that the British have withdrawn some of their equipment from there, prior to handing it over to the American forces, with whom they will share the base in the future.

As to the Salalah air base, the name of the British forces here was changed into the Sultans air forces. All posters and signs about RAF has been changed into posters and signs saying Sultans air forces, but the British are still present on the base and run it completely.

Besides the Salalah base, which is directly under the control of RAF, there are nearly 150 pilots and administrative officers from different nationalities working in the so-called Sultans air force. Most of these persons are British, and of the remaining most are Ceylonese and Australians.

In addition there are nearly 50 British officers and non-commissioned officers who run the new air-network for the Anglo-French made Jaguar planes and the anti-aircraft Rapier rockets(modern flights and rockets which demand their own special system of radar etc.).

As for the navy, there are about 200 British, Pakistani and Indian officers and non-commissioned officers. Most of these are Indians and Pakistanis, and some of these are seconded from the armies of their countries while the others are there on contract. As to the British

in the navy their number is decreasing but they hold the command and key positions.

As for the other British forces, the main force is the British Army Training Team (BATT), which in reality is a SAS (Special Air Service) commando unit. This unit, estimated in numbers to about 500, gives advanced training to the Sultans army and the tribal divisions (Firqats), in addition to being the vanguard of the local army.

The SAS forces are highly trained commandos, with antiguerrilla experience from Greece, Malaya, Kenya, Cyprus, South Yemen and Ireland. In every infantry operation, carried out by the Sultans army, some of these forces go in the front as a vanguard together with a unit of Firqats. It can be added, that every Firqat unit have 2 officers, 1 British and one local, and the British is in command.

Under the command of BATT is operating a team called the 'Second Information Team - 2IT' which is sometimes called the 'Psychological Operations - Psyops' with headquarters at Um al-Ghawaref at Salalah. Their job is to run the psychological warfare, fx 'the hearts and mind campaign'. This includes producing pamphlets and other propaganda activities, fx some years ago they established a local broadcasting station in Salalah and distributed small radios to the population. So small that they could only receive this local station.

In connection with the RAF controlled Salalah base, there are for protection several field artillery batteries and a special battery called the 'Sound Ranging Battery'. This last battery has some special equipment which enables them to locate the place where the firing from artillery and mortars are coming. It was established some years ago, when PFLO-attacks on the air-base was the order of the day.

There are also a British engineering battalion, which operates independently, although to some extent under BATT, but with its own headquarters. This battalion is under the command of a major or a Lt.-Colonel.

In addition to these regular British forces, there are the British seconded to and on contract in the Sultans army, which are nearly 800 officers and non-commissioned officers who undertake training and administration of the Sultans army. This is in addition to other

officers and non-commissioned officers from different nationalities mostly Australians, Indians, Pakistanis and Ceylonese. Their numbers is estimated around 500.

THE IRANIAN FORCES IN OMAN

Iranian land, air and naval forces are present in several parts of Oman and particularly in the southern area, in Dhofar. There is a mixture of infantry and special forces stationed in the western area of Dhofar, i.e. close to the border to Democratic Yemen. This force is known as the Imperial Iranian Task Force (IITF) with command in Hairoon, which is sometimes known as 'Manston', north of Rakhyut. This force constitute the well known Demavand Line, which stretches from the town of Rakhyut to Hairoon in the north.

In January 1977, when the withdrawal of some Iranian forces from the western area of Dhofar was announced, it appeared in fact that part of this force was withdrawn. But I do not know the nature of that withdrawal and whether these forces have been withdrawn to Iran or are still in other parts of Oman. This is a matter subject to discussion, but it is certain that there are still thousands of Iranians along the Demavand Line.

There are also several air defence batteries in Sallalah, Thamreet, Sarfeet, Makinat Shahn and Hebroot, i.e. along the border to PDRY and around important positions.

Further the Iranians operates radar systems in the Thamreet air base and a radar base north of Qairoon Hariti (at the highest point of the red line), almost halfway between Salalah and Thamreet. This base directs planes from both Thamreet and Salalah airbases.

At Thamreet airbase there are Iranian military planes of the Phantom type. But these planes do not stay for long periods in the base, but return to Teheran through Masirah Island from time to time after carrying out reconnaissance operations over the Yemeni border. Also the Iranian attacks in past and present against the population, the PFLO and across the border to PDRY are carried out by Phantoms stationed in Teheran and only using Masirah and Thamreet for short periods.

In addition there are at Thamreet Iranian transport aircrafts of the C-130 type and helicopters operating by the side of the Qaboos air force.

The Iranian forces operates independent under their own command and there is very limited daily contact between the Sultan's army and the Iranians, although there of course is cooperation and coordination on high level.

Concerning the presence of the Iranian forces in the north of Oman, I do not know in detail. But I came to know from official and non-official sources, that they have land and air forces at Ras Massendum at the Hormus Strait, where no Omani forces exists and also at Um al-Ghanam Island.

THE JORDANIAN FORCES IN OMAN

There are a large number of Jordanian officers and non-commissioned officers in Oman. They are spread all over Oman, most of them as intelligence officers undertaking the training of the civilian and military intelligence services of the Sultan. They are responsible for the torture against political prisoners at Jallali and Ramees prisons. A number of Jordanians are in charge of training the army after the example of the Royal Jordanian Army, fx. some are instructors in the Royal Guard of Qaboos.

There are also officers and non-commissioned officers in the sultanates artillery and in the general command.

In addition to this there is an engineering battalion working in Dhofar. Its task is to plant mines and to clear advanced positions from mines, to build military roads and to train the local engineering battalion.

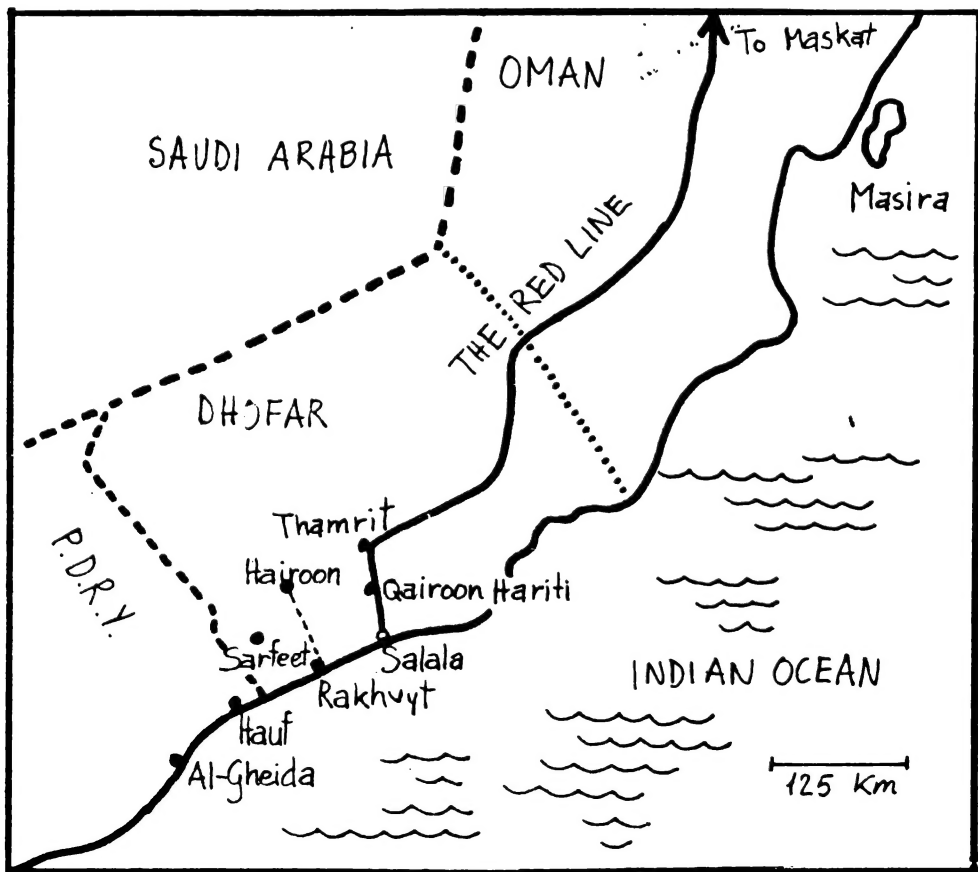
When the Iranians moved from the Red Line to the West of Dhofar, a regiment of Jordanian special troops took over their positions along the Red Line. This regiment has however been removed by now.

THE REVOLUTION CONTINUES

Despite all the contradictory announcements by the puppet Qaboos and other reactionary members of his regime about the 'defeat' of the revolution, the whole mobilization of the army is based on the fact, that the revolution is still in existence and a full resumption of military activities by the Front is imminent. The soldiers are told that they should be ready to enter a war and perhaps a different kind than the one they have been fighting. They are

taught by the British trainers, that most of the people still sympathise with the revolution and therefore are considered against the government.

On the other hand, the People's Liberation Army's military operations which was recently carried out in the Central and Eastern regions of Dhofar (June 77), has proven to both the army of Qaboos and the Omani people, that the authority's fake announcements about the 'end' of the revolution, are only a part of the colonialists plan to deceive the Omani people and to isolate the revolution from its natural supporters. They also proved that the revolution is still there, and it will remain there untill victory, despite Qaboos and the Shah and their bosses.



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